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Shaw, Leslie Mortier

The need of leadership

[St. Joseph, Mo.]

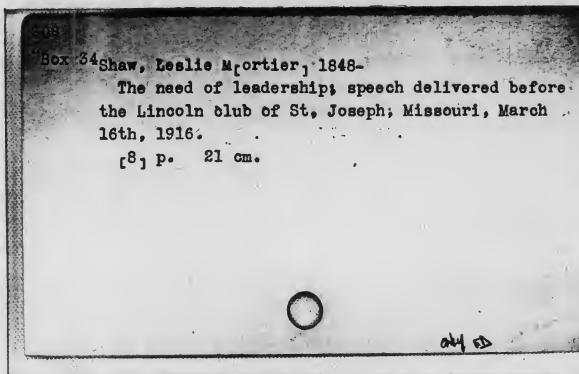
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The Need of Leadership

BY

HON. LESLIE M. SHAW

Speech delivered before the
Lincoln Club of St. Joseph,
Missouri, March 16th, 1916.

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1925 -

The Need of Leadership.

At the close of the Civil War the United States of America occupied a unique position. It had matchless resources undeveloped, and matchless resourcefulness untried. For fifty years, with scarcely a break, the government was under the control of a political party which then believed, and which now believes that happiness is dependent upon industry—a party that then knew, and now knows that prosperity is impossible while any considerable number are vainly seeking employment. For fifty years, with scarcely a break, it was the policy of the government to co-operate with business, to encourage enterprise, and to foster development. Whenever any one claimed to be able to pioneer an industry, he was told to be quick about it and the government would stand by him.

So, when General Dodge and his associates said they could build a railroad to the Pacific Ocean, the government expressed surprise, but promised aid. It had been thought impossible to build even a wagon-road across the Rockies. The promoters asked one-half the land for a certain distance on either side of the proposed road, and certain financial aid. The government replied: "You might as well have the land as not, it is absolutely worthless now, and under present conditions, will always remain worthless. The money you can also have." To the astonishment of everyone, except the promoters, the enterprise was a success. Other roads soon followed, built because of similar encouragements, and as a result, what might be called the Rocky Mountain Empire, yielding gold by the carload, all other metals, coal, cattle, grain and fruits by the trainload, and affording happy homes for some millions of people, has been long since an accomplished fact.

Then certain men said they could build a silk mill. Again the government expressed surprise. A silk mill in the United States of America, which produces no raw silk, and where wages are twice as high as in competing countries! What do you want? We want raw silk free of duty, and when any

foreign producer brings his finished products in competition with ours, we want him to contribute to the support of this government sixty cents out of every dollar of foreign value. "All right," said Congress, "if you can't live at that, we will make him put sixty-five cents into the treasury." What is the result? Thirty-five million dollars' worth of raw silk is imported annually free of duty, and forty million dollars paid out in wages each year in making it up. Similar encouragement was given, and like results were attained in more than one hundred distinct industries, until we possess accumulated wealth unequaled, standards of living unapproached, and scales of wages averaging one hundred per cent. higher than the highest. Listen! Our farms produce more than the farms of any other country on the map; our mines yield gold by the trainload, silver and copper more abundantly still, and we unload, upon the shores of Ohio alone, more iron ore than any other country in the world produces. We cut from our forests one hundred million feet of lumber for every day of the calendar year; our domestic commerce is twenty times the aggregate international trade of all creation; we manufacture, even in normal times, more finished products than all the shops and all the factories of Great Britain and Germany and France combined, plus five thousand millions every twelve months, and we pay out as much in wages as all the rest of the world. All this has been accomplished as the logical result of, and in strictest harmony with the Republican policy of business co-operation and industrial encouragement.

But greed of gain, whetted by indulgence, lead to practices in many instances very reprehensible. This rendered punishment necessary, and it was administered with a free and generous hand. The government was as liberal in imposing penalties as it had been in bestowing rewards. Many of the biggest of the big boys were whipped in the presence of the infant class, to the very great satisfaction and even the amusement of all little people. This was the source of such universal gratification, afforded such delicious entertainment to all except the participants, that it well nigh became a pastime to get after the fellows higher up. In short, we had almost come to believe corporal punishment the only appro-

priate exercise for the political school-room and criminal prosecutions the true aim and end for which governments are instituted among men, when, suddenly, and without premonition or warning, a new condition confronts us. The world has gone mad. We are tempted to follow. We are also tempted to skulk and hide. We are tempted to surrender and abandon all for which our fathers fought, and for which the Flag stands pledged. We are tempted to flee responsibilities precipitately thrust upon us, and to seek safety in the surrender of all those ideals, those hopes, those human aspirations which the world has learned to admire, which we intuitively love, and which find fitting expression in the oft-repeated phrase, "American Institutions."

In our efforts to remain sane shall we become cowards? Is our desire to continue true and courageous, shall we go mad? God forbid! In our efforts to steer between extremes, our hearts cry out for leadership. We are drifting we know not where. The American heart is always right. It always throbs to the voice of truth. Our wanderings are always wanderings of judgment—never of conscience. Our uncertainties are uncertainties of counsel, never of intent. In times like these, God give us men—give us leadership, give us a group, an organization of broadminded, hopeful, unselfish, trustful, God-fearing, co-ordinated and co-ordinating men—who believe something worth believing, and who have the courage to effectuate what they believe, and the wisdom to stand by and defend what they do.

Fortunately, there are no longer differences to be composed within the Republican Party. Questions that seemed all-important four years ago are no longer even referred to in private conversation or public discussion. The Party was rent, not on fundamental issues, but on questions of political procedure, which never had excuse or justification except in precedent. If the great nominating committee, which is to convene at Chicago in June, shall be composed of uninstructed members, selected from the several States because of their wide acquaintance, their familiarity with business and labor conditions, their knowledge of commercial possibilities, and of international complications, and not for their personal

aspirations, or because of combinations and pledges in the interests of certain candidates, and who attend with only two fixed purposes—first, to hoist again the Flag of Americanism, and, second, to select a candidate regardless of the State which happens to call him “son,” independent of any interests or locality that may be behind him, but a candidate big enough, broad enough, true enough, experienced enough, and wise enough to merit selection to such a position, by such a party, in a convention composed of such delegates, all will be well. If this great nominating committee shall be composed of the best but unpledged blood and brain from all the States, and shall sit for some days in unselfish council, with heads uncovered, and—figuratively speaking—“with shoes from off their feet,” and shall then be able to certify that, having thrown expediency to the dogs, they have unselfishly followed their judgments and done the best they could, with eye single to the future welfare and glory of their country, the people will ratify their choice, whoever he may be. Anything short of this will be an empty honor.

And after election, what? Again, the United States of America occupies a unique position, a position big with possibilities, a position not without analogy with that of a half century ago. I think we may safely assume that business has learned its lesson, and that hereafter it will be reasonably obedient, to statute law—and, what is better still, true to the fundamental principles of fair and upright dealing. I think we may safely lay the rod over the door, being careful to make no reference thereto, or to its recent uses. It will not be necessary to apologize for what has been so wisely done, and which should be neither undone nor repeated, unless future events render such repetition necessary. It should not be deemed reactionary for Uncle Sam to quit licking the big boys while he gets in his hay. When a church has been torn by factions, it is seldom wise to select a preacher to compose differences. What that church needs is some one to preach the gospel. Then, when the doors are thrown open, when the seats are known to be free, when it is definitely understood that no one is to be asked to apologize or explain, when even the passersby can hear the old truths ringing out once more loud and clear,

the entire membership will rally as of yore. And they will come, not only with shouts of victory, but they will bring a new generation with them.

All Europe is learning efficiency by learning co-ordination. The survivors from the trenches, like the survivors from Gettysburg, Menassa, and the thousand other encounters that tested the metal within the men more than the metal in the arms they bore, will return the best disciplined, and the most efficient, and they will prove the strongest business competitors the world has ever seen. But, if the old policy of governmental encouragement to business and protection for American labor within the American market shall be adopted and adhered to, in far less than fifty years we will have become as great and influential internationally as we are now nationally. Otherwise, we will surely find ourselves distanced.

If we are to keep our men employed, and find markets for the products of their labor, if we are to have a merchant marine, if we are to participate in the commerce and the development of Central America, South America, South Africa and the islands of the sea, we must quit making treaties, securing to our people the right of taking part in the exploitation of the resources of these countries, participating in their commerce and sharing in the profits incident to these things, if, when trouble arises, we intend to cable them to come home. We must not ask our banks to plant branches in distant lands, and our factories to establish warehouses and trade agencies abroad, and ships to float our flag while carrying beneath all skies the products of our farms, our factories, our mines and our forests if, when they have conformed to our wishes, relying in good faith on the treaty rights which the government has solemnly secured for them, we intend to taunt and insult when the test comes by saying, “You went there to make money, didn’t you? Now, take your chances.”

No! If we are to take our place among the peoples of the world which God intended when He plucked the ripest and best seed from all climes with which to plant this blessed land, following the planting by deliverances from dangers innumerable, and guidance through crises many, pouring, the while, into our laps the wealth of the ages, we must co-ordi-

nate ourselves to take advantage of our opportunities. We can never do it, however—we can never do any considerable portion of it—we can never measure up to what we ought to enjoy, to what we ought to be, to the influence for good in the world which we ought to exert, unless we have a self-respecting and world-wide respected government over us, absolute assurance back of us, high ideals in front of us, and deep-seated, abiding faith within us. God give us leadership!

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